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ABSTRACT

The ERIC system's commitment to reaching diverse user audiences, coupled with the rapid advancement of information technologies, has resulted in a larger-than-ever selection of access points to ERIC. This digest discusses the original and newer means of accessing the ERIC bibliographic database of education-related materials. The access points discussed are online access through commercial services; CD-ROM; locally-mounted systems and Internet access; and print access. Other topics include acquiring ERIC articles and documents, extension of services beyond the ERIC database, and future plans for ERIC. A source list is included. (JLB)

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September 1992

Access Points to ERIC: Update 1992

by Nancy R. Preston

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ERIC DIGEST

September 1992 EDO-IR-92-6

Access Points to ERIC: Update 1992

By Nancy R. Preston

Now in its second quarter-century, ERIC (the Educational Resources Information Center) has evolved from a research database into a multi-faceted information system serving teachers, administrators, researchers, parents, students, and others interested in education. At the heart of ERIC is the world's largest education database, providing coverage of journal articles and document literature from a wide range of public and private sources. The system also features a variety of products and services "above and beyond" the database, designed to put educational information into the hands of people who need it. ERIC's commitment to reaching diverse user audiences, coupled with the rapid advancement of information technologies, has resulted in a larger-than-ever selection of access points to ERIC.

Online Access Through Commercial Services

The original way to access the ERIC database by computer was through a telecommunications link to a commercial online database vendor. Today ERIC is available through two such vendors: **DIALOG Information Services** and **BRS Information Technologies**. These services offer the most powerful and sophisticated search capabilities, the ability to access the entire database (from 1966 to the latest month) at once, and the ability to execute complex search strategies. One must be trained in the vendor's search language to utilize the most powerful search capabilities, however, so this type of searching is usually performed by librarians and other professionals. Costs include a membership fee and charges based on the number of minutes connected to the service and the number of citations downloaded.

For home users, both DIALOG and BRS offer special services such as evening and weekend rates and menu-driven searching. The vendors also offer classroom instruction programs, for students in elementary through graduate levels, with discounted rates and group services.

In addition to database vendors, several multi-purpose online information services exist for general consumers. One, **CompuServe**, offers access to the ERIC database through its IQuest search system. This system is designed for the novice, with menu-driven keyword searching and per-search pricing.

GTE Education Services is an online service especially for teachers and school administrators. Members have access to many information resources, including the latest three years of ERIC, through a menu-driven interface. Search fees are based on the number of minutes connected. GTE also offers access to ACCESS ERIC's *Reference and Referral Databases*, and the *ERIC Digests Online* file (see below).

OCLC, or the Online Computer Library Center, Inc., is an online bibliographic utility used by thousands of libraries around the world. Recently, OCLC began offering FirstSearch, an information service designed for direct use by library patrons. ERIC is one of many databases accessible through FirstSearch. Fees and access policies for this service are determined by the host library.

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CD-ROM

In 1986, ERIC became the first major bibliographic database marketed on CD-ROM, and this product has been extremely popular ever since. CD-ROM (compact disk, read-only memory) technology allows vast quantities of data to be stored on compact disks, which are searchable at self-contained personal computer stations. Two vendors, **SilverPlatter Information** and **DIALOG Information Services**, currently produce ERIC on CD-ROM for both IBM and Macintosh platforms. The systems are designed to be used with little instruction, yet they retain many of the powerful search features of online systems. Both ERIC CD-ROM products are updated quarterly and sold on a set-fee subscription basis, which makes them a cost-effective option for libraries that offer open access. While in the past CD-ROM systems were limited to single users, advances in networking technology now allow multiple users to access a single CD-ROM database simultaneously.

Locally-Mounted Systems and Internet Access

An increasing number of institutions, especially universities and state university systems, are mounting ERIC data on their own mainframes for use by their clientele. The host institutions bear the cost of maintaining the database, select the search software, and determine their own access policies. In some cases the ERIC database is linked to the library's online public access catalog, or OPAC, and searched with the same interface. In other cases it is part of a campus information system that uses information retrieval software obtained from **BRS** or the **SPIRES Consortium**.

Recently there has been a trend toward Internet access to OPACs, campus information systems, and other electronic resources, including locally-mounted ERIC. Often, remote access to these systems is limited to registered users. But some institutions do offer open Internet access to all or part of the ERIC database. Current information about all Internet-accessible ERIC resources is available from the **ERIC Clearinghouse on Information Resources**. ERIC data tapes are sold by the **ERIC Processing and Reference Facility.**

Old But Still Good: Print Access

Manual searching of printed indexes, once the only way to access the ERIC database, is still a viable option. Two monthly indexes announce the latest additions to the database: *Current Index to Journals in Education* (CIJE) for journal articles, and *Resources in Education* (RIE) for documents, the "fugitive literature" of education that is not commercially published. About 3,000 locations around the world subscribe to one or both of the indexes, which are also available at Federal depository libraries. There is also a microfiche version of the RIE index, which is issued annually and includes data from 1966 to the current year.

Print and microfiche indexes are relatively inexpensive options for the institution wishing to offer ERIC access. Advantages for the user are that no special training is needed and the database contents can easily be browsed. For information about subscribing to CIJE, contact the publisher, **Oryx Press**. RIE subscriptions are managed

by the **Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office**. The microfiche index to ERIC documents is offered by the **ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS).**

Acquiring ERIC Articles and Documents

Users of ERIC can obtain copies of journal articles and documents through several sources. Articles cited in CIJE are not provided in full text by the ERIC system; users may find copies at public or university libraries or order copies from private reprint services. Most documents announced in RIE, however, can be read at the nearly 900 university libraries and research centers that hold the ERIC document microfiche collection. The **ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS)**, which produces these microfiche collections, also fills individual orders for ERIC documents in microfiche or paper copy. Orders can be placed directly to EDRS by mail, telephone, or fax, or placed online during a DIALOG or OCLC search. In addition to standing mircofiche subscriptions, EDRS sells the entire ERIC collection of over 320,000 documents and subsets of RIE documents by year and by clearinghouse.

Above and Beyond the ERIC Database

In recent years, the ERIC system has placed increased emphasis on extending services beyond the well-known ERIC database. Clearinghouses and support components engage in many outreach activities to share the expertise gained through database building and partnership with important organizations in their fields. All Clearinghouses offer user services, including question-answering, advice in preparing ERIC searches, and workshops.

Another way they share their knowledge is through publications that synthesize information. The best known product is the *ERIC Digest* series—short reports summarizing "hot topics" in education. Other products include monographs, trends and issues analyses, bibliographies and prepared searches, curriculum support materials, and newsletters and brochures. For information on publications and services, contact the clearinghouse of interest. A list of all clearinghouses may be obtained from **ACCESS ERIC** (see below).

ERIC Digests Online, or EDO, is an online file of most ERIC Digests produced since 1988, in full text. As of the end of 1991, the file contained about 950 digests from all 16 ERIC clearinghouses. EDO can be accessed through a DIALOG online search. It is also available through GTE Education Services (described above), and at least one Internet-accessible electronic bulletin board system. For information about purchasing the *ERIC Digests Online* file, contact the **ERIC Processing and Reference Facility**. For information about Internet access, contact the **ERIC Clearinghouse on Information Resources**.

ACCESS ERIC, a recent addition to the ERIC family, serves as a gateway to the entire system. Through its toll-free number (1-800-LET-ERIC), ACCESS ERIC answers questions about using ERIC and refers callers to the appropriate Clearinghouses. It also serves as a central dissemination point for ERIC Clearinghouse products. ACCESS ERIC produces several reference and referral directories. These resources are sold in print form and can also be accessed online through **GTE Education Services** (see above). Titles include: *Directory of ERIC Information Service Providers*, *Directory of Education-Related Information Centers*, and *Calendar of Education-Related Conferences*.

Other products of ACCESS ERIC include the *Conclusion Brochure* series, information for parents on such topics as "How Do I Help My Child Say No to Drugs?" and "How Can We Help Children Learn Geography?"; the *ERIC Review*, a free journal focusing on one educational topic per issue; and the general ERIC brochures, *All About ERIC*, and *A Pocket Guide to ERIC*.

The Future

ERIC is a dynamic system, always changing in response to users' needs, trends in the field of education, and developing technologies. This digest provides a snapshot of ERIC today. In the future, look for ERIC services over the Internet, a full-text "Best of ERIC" product on CD-ROM, and electronic document delivery.

This digest was prepared by Nancy R. Preston, Assistant Director, ERIC Clearinghouse on Information Resources, Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York. September 1992.

ERIC Digests are in the public domain and may be freely reproduced and disseminated.

Sources

ACCESS ERIC
1600 Research Blvd.
Rockville, MD 20850-3172
1-800-LET-ERIC
ACCERIC@GWUVM.GWU.EDU

BRS Information Technologies
Maxwell Online, Inc.
8000 Westpark Dr.
McLean, VA 22102
For online services:1-800-289-4277
(703) 442-0900
For mainframe software:
(703) 442-3870

CompuServe
5000 Arlington Centre Blvd.
Columbus, OH 43220
1-800-848-8990
(614) 457-8600

DIALOG Information Services, Inc.
3460 Hillview Ave.
Palo Alto, CA 94304-1396
1-800-3-DIALOG (1-800-334-2564)
(415) 858-3785

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D/FW Airport, TX 75261-9810
1-800-927-3000

OCLC
6565 Frantz Road
Dublin, OH 43017-3395
1-800-848-5800

Oryx Press
4041 North Central Ave.
at Indian School
Suite 700
Phoenix, AZ 85012-3397
1-800-279-ORYX
(602) 265-2651

SilverPlatter Information, Inc.
100 Silver Ridge Drive
Norwood, MA 02062-5026
(617) 769-2599
800-343-0064

SPIRES Consortium
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